Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak... It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.

JOHN BERGER Ways of Seeing
When you go out there you don’t get away from it all... you come home to yourself

Peter Dombrovskis

On first looking at Ilona Schneider’s wonderful images of the Tasmanian landscape, viewers are likely to find themselves drawn in two conflicting directions. On the one hand, what appears in these images are indeed landscapes, and their appearance is not dissimilar from the way landscape appears within the tradition of ‘romantic’ landscape art. Here we see landscape in its power and presence, in its seeming beauty and its sublimity, in its topographic singularity. On the other hand, this experience of landscape is tempered, perhaps even countered, by the sense that what appears are landscapes that may well be thought compromised, diminished, scarred by the marks of human activity and habitation. The tension between these conflicting directions is a large part of what gives these images such an immediately affecting character. These are not images from which one can easily stand aside or with respect to which one can remain neutral - as if what is presented are mere objects of aesthetic and spectatorial appreciation. These are images that draw us directly into them, provoking an almost instantaneous, if sometimes uncertain, response, and they do so precisely because we are, in a certain sense, already present in the landscapes that these images explore – present in and through the traces of human activity by which those landscapes are so clearly marked. Moreover, the way human presence is evident in these images, and so the way it belongs to the landscapes that appear, is seldom such as to remain merely ‘in the background’. In keeping with the herculean character of the engineering projects to which many of these images relate, what is shown here is a human presence that is projected into the landscape as a veritable challenge to it - a presence that is as raw and uncompromising as the rock that it also lays bare.

Yet the challenge here goes both ways. The land is challenging as well as challenged. The suffering and struggle to which these images implicitly bear witness is a suffering and struggle that belongs to the human beings who worked and lived in these landscapes as much as it does to the landscapes themselves. If there is wilderness here, and there surely is that, it is the true wilderness - the true wilderness - that belongs both to the 'natural' and to the human. Indeed, since any and every image of wilderness is an image of a certain encounter with the wild, and in every such encounter, in virtue...
of its very character as an encounter, the human is always implicated, so there is no wilderness but that which emerges in and out of the human engagement with nature. Moreover, that encounter is both an engagement with the place of the encounter, which is why landscape looms so large here, as well as an engagement with ourselves.

The dynamism that is so much a part of these images, and of the landscapes that they show, is not, however, only a result of the seeming tension between the ‘natural’ and the ‘human’, the ‘unbuilt’ and the ‘built’, or the ‘challenged’ and the ‘challenging’. The manner of composition of the images is such as to draw attention to movements and directions that each landscape contains within it (composition is no ‘imposition’, but works from out of what is already given). This movement and direction is evident in different ways in different images. In some the movement and direction is vertical, down the vertiginous side of a dam wall or spread out across an opposing rock face. In others, the movement is horizontal, out across a dissected or jagged field, to a barely glimpsed distance beyond, sometimes round the curve of a hill or through the enclosing embrace of vegetation. These are landscapes in which roads and lines, ladders and entrance-ways, paths and pipelines seem always to be drawing us along and towards. These are ‘moving’ images, not in the sense that they show things moving (the only movement evident here is of wind and water) nor even in their capacity to move, which is to say, to animate and to affect, but rather in the way that each and every image contains the marks and traces of movement. There is thus a restlessness that belongs to these images, and perhaps to the very landscapes themselves, that cannot be thrown off – as if the marks of human activity have scored so deep that they have become part of the very life of the landscape.

The restless mobility of these landscapes might well seem at odds with their apparent remoteness – all the more so since what human intervention in these landscapes aimed to bring about was a drawing of each and every such landscape into a wider network of productivity and connection, and so to work against the spatial distance that otherwise operates to restrict the harnessing of power, utility, and resource. Here again is an indication of our prior implication in the landscapes that appear in these images – those landscapes are as proximate to us as are the transmission lines that connect to our homes and workplaces, as the devices and appliances that are so much a part of our everyday lives. Strange that so small a thing as the lighting of a room, or the copper wire that makes that lighting possible, may trace back to the moving of mountains and the stopping of rivers.
Still, as they are now, and as they are seen here, these landscapes are both close and faraway. For most Tasmanians, even if these images are not entirely unfamiliar, they are images that belong to a Tasmanian hinterland that is mostly unfrequented, and often remains hidden and even forgotten. There is thus a remoteness that these landscapes indeed retain – a remoteness of space, and also a remoteness of time. This temporal remoteness is evident in the sense of abandonment and even decay that accompanies many of these images, and in the feeling of a certain lack of completion, of hopes and dreams unfulfilled, of promise never realised. The landscapes that appear here thus remain as turbid as the clouded skies that hang above them, and the light that fills them is always darkened, heavy, filled with the portents of rain, wind, and cold. They offer no simple resolution or harmony beyond the constancy of their movement.

The tensions within them give to these landscapes a weirdness that readily leads to a degree of disorientation. Are we looking down or up? Is what we see part of the landscape or merely part of the image? In some cases, this gives rise to effects of decomposition or abstraction as the elements of the image are no longer able readily to be contextualised or brought together and as the very identity of what appears becomes uncertain, dislocated, confused. Yet if such decompositional abstraction disorients, it also draws attention to the sheer appearance of what appears and the strange mystery of that appearance. Nowhere is this more powerfully evident than in the images of exposed earth and rock. In the ripping open of the land, in its seeming destruction and desecration, what is nevertheless revealed is its dense, impenetrable, and abiding presence.

Sometimes the destabilisation of the image occurs, not through its elemental breakdown or a loss of its overall context or orientation, but instead by means of the seeming intrusion of some small untoward detail – a daub of fluorescent colour, a sign containing a word or name, the glimpse of a far-off building or cleared field. Suddenly the entire view shifts. We are drawn from the expansive to the minute, from a sense of dereliction to a reminder of continued activity, from the land’s muteness to a sudden flash of speech. Yet significantly, these intrusions, which would otherwise be sources of human meaning and intelligibility, here become themselves anomalous, and the meaning they may ordinarily carry with them is itself destabilised and destabilising. Even if we can know or can surmise for whom these marks and signs are intended, still there is an eddy suggesting that they can be rendered unequivocal and familiar in the midst of such strangeness.
Once again, the landscape, and the image by which it is framed, refuses to allow any settling of the tensions and uncertainties that appear within it and that belong so essentially to it.

Much of Tasmanian landscape photography has focussed either on landscape as wild nature or on landscape as picturesque scene. Ilona Schneider’s images make some reference to both of these (even the picturesque is partially reflected here, though the reflection is an inverted one) at the same time as they remain apart from them. These are images of a Tasmanian landscape that resist any reduction of that landscape to a human construction, to a natural phenomenon, to the object of an aesthetic image. Thus, although what appears here are indeed ‘landscapes’, their nature as landscapes remains opaque and unresolved.

These images do not present us with a settled view of landscape, but rather open landscape to a questionability, an uncertainty, a restlessness that seems to belong to its very nature as landscape – and especially to its nature as landscape in a Tasmanian setting. One might therefore say that these images do not, in fact, present landscapes at all – at least not if we think of landscapes as more or less harmonised images of places – but rather allow some of the complex of forces that make for the very formation of landscape, and so also of place, to be made visible. Yet perhaps this is actually how landscape should be understood: not as some settled image, scene, or view, but rather as an active matrix in and through which this complex of forces emerge.

That ‘complex of forces’ includes the temporal no less than the spatial, since these images engage with the past as well as with an ambiguous present (ambiguous because in many of these images what is shown has already changed or even disappeared), with a certain history of landscape as well as with its nature. One might say, therefore, that these images contribute to a certain ‘natural history’ of the Tasmanian landscape (though it is indeed only a contribution and so necessarily partial). It is, however, a natural history that is not restricted to some narrow conception of the ‘natural’ nor to a foreshortened version of the ‘historical’. Here neither nature nor history can be separated from one another – each is embedded in the other. The nature of landscape, then, appears through its history, which also means, through its entanglement with human life and work; and the history of landscape is evident only in the unfolding of its nature from which the human cannot be excluded. But if landscape is at issue here, just as is the ‘natural’ and the ‘historical’, then so too is the human itself – which also means that just as we are
implicated in these images from the start, so too are we implicated in the questionability that these images open up.

If the starting point for the engagement with these images is with the seeming tension between their appearance as landscapes and the appearance of these landscapes as somehow compromised or diminished, then what should now be evident is the extent to which that initial tension, though it represents an important point of entry into these images, itself depends on a problematic opposition between landscape and the human impact upon it – between landscape as somehow original and ‘natural’ and landscape as compromised or diminished. One can certainly judge human interventions in the landscape as good or ill (though even that judgment is often less easy than it may seem), but this does not mean that one can also judge the landscapes that result from human intervention as somehow having become less as landscapes, perhaps ceasing to be landscapes at all. Just as human activity is always itself in a landscape, neither does landscape ever stand apart from human activity. What we see in Ilona Schneider’s images is landscape in its complexity and indeterminacy, in its permanence and its fragility, in its character as encompassing the human, rather than merely as subject to it. Here, embedded in rock and earth, seaming along the contours of mountain and gorge, fossilised in weathered outcrops of concrete and metal, the human seems almost to become itself a part of a landscape that, through the very history by which it is marked, draws everything into itself – even what might have once seemed alien to it. Yet this enfolding into landscape is also an outfolding of landscape into the world – a constant process that is never finally resolved, that always remains indeterminate, and whose singular complexity of appearance can never be exhausted.

JEFF MALPAS
Distinguished Professor, University of Tasmania
The quality of beauty is in the truth of life, newly assimilated and immersed by the artist, in fidelity to his personal vision.

ANDREY TARJOVSKY Sculpting in Time
MURAL, QUEENSTOWN 2012  giclée print, 56 x 84cm

TARRALEAH TRACKS 2012  giclée print, 56 x 84cm
I am intrigued by the aesthetic dissonances created by altered landscapes, the sublime embrace of labour, power, and nature; the strange beauty of decay and exhausted earth; the cold, blue light reflected on the winding roads into the land; the endurance of past remnants in the present.

ILONA SCHNEIDER
Ultimately, photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is pensive, when it thinks.

ROLAND BARTHES  *Camera Lucida*
LAKE MARGARET 2012  giclée print, 57.6 x 84cm

LYELL HIGHWAY 2014  giclée print, 56.5 x 84cm
The image is an expression of truth, a glimpse of the truth permitted to us in our blindness. The incarnate image will be faithful when its articulations are palpably the expression of truth, when they make it unique, singular—as life itself is, even in its simplest manifestation.

ANDREY TARKOVSKY  Sculpting in Time
WAYSTNM 2017: giclée print, 50.5 x 66cm
The image is indivisible and elusive, dependent upon our consciousness and on the real world which it seeks to embody. If the world is inscrutable, then the image will be so too. It is a kind of equation, signifying the correlation between truth and the human consciousness, bound as the latter is by Euclidean space. We cannot comprehend the totality of the universe, but the poetic image is able to express that totality.

ANDREY TARKOVSKY. Sculpting in Time
GORDON DAM 2014  giclée print, 97 x 137 cm

PENSTOCK AT BRonte PARK 2013  giclée print, 92 x 137 cm
PINE TIER DAM 2013  giclée print, 81 x 127 cm

LAKE GORDON 2017  giclée print, 100 x 137 cm
QUEENSTOWN 2012  giclée print, 53 x 84cm

CORINNA 2015  giclée print, 56 x 84cm
I like to observe the things that exist in this world that are so extraordinarily ordinary. Just as the essence of sound is time and space, so seeing needs time and uninterrupted space. The practice of seeing is in listening to what speaks to you.

Ilona Schneider
Ilona Schneider’s present Landmarks series signals an important development in contemporary landscape photography that marks a departure from the well-established forms of wilderness photography in favour of vistas portraying inhabited landscape in all of its distinctive specificities. Ilona’s works return to an aesthetics, where composed forms and the language of tonalities illustrate the unique situations of our humanised environments.

**Inhabited Landscape**

Photography is typically polarised along politicised lines in our times. On the one hand, we have social documentary work, which generally expresses a politically progressive point of view, usually weighted with notions of social justice. This work is almost always urban-centred and rarely ventures beyond the city limits, and when it does, it often frames what is considered backward, underdeveloped, or impoverished. Against this has arisen a form of landscape work, associated with names such as Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Eliot Porter, and, closer to home, Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dobrovskis and numerous other landscape photographers, whose work is also politicised, but here resisting the degradations of ‘development’ in defence of a vanishing natural habitat. In contrast to the thoroughly humanised social documentary, we have wilderness photography typically framed as expressive of a naturalistic ‘Geist’ inhabiting a milieu of pristine nature, untouched by ‘the hand of man’ and offering a refuge for the alienated subjects of modern social life seeking to recover a lost relatedness to the natural world.

Ilona has never been comfortable with either of these genres. Ilona was born in Switzerland and grew up in Salzburg, Austria. This is alpine country and during her childhood the whole family frequently took long walks in the mountain forests. The people of this part of the world have a pretty strong feeling for their natural environment. This is so, and yet the very idea of a wilderness, of an uninhabited land, is simply foreign to her. For Ilona, people and country are a package deal and necessarily go together, for better or worse. Thus, the ‘hand of man’, conspicuously absent from the landscape of wilderness photography, is generally present in the images of the country that Ilona grew up in, as well as the work she’s done here in Tasmania. Hence she’s termed her landscape series ‘Landmarks’.
PORTRAITURE

I take the view that aside from the subject matter of Ilona’s photography, i.e., the inhabited landscape, what primarily distinguishes Ilona’s photographic style proceeds from the fact that at the beginning of her career she trained as an apprentice at a portrait studio in her native Salzburg, in Austria. Portraiture in the classical sense is supposed to be a two way street. The sitter presents a countenance they wish to project but the photographer is expected to perform a personal interpretation, and in truth this happens anyway. The characteristic ‘look’ of portrait work always depends upon the alchemy between sitting subject and photographer. This is why the best portraiture has always been regarded as an art form.

So then, I want to suggest that Ilona’s landscape work is as interesting as it is because her images are so many two way streets, where the subject matter is enabled to exhibit the distinctive differences and particularities of what they are. What’s distinctive about Ilona’s work is best understood by taking note of what is absent from it. Absent is the heavy handed judgements we are all too familiar with. Ilona’s views of our inhabited landscape are so many portraits of places where we live, work, and do all those things we do to and for ourselves and our environment – for better or worse. Ilona’s images are generally non-judgemental. They neither castigate development nor celebrate the onward and upwards ascent of technology. But still, her images often and very subtly problematise our built world. As I view her images, many seem to pose the question: ‘is this sustainable?’. Is the world presented to us a world we can live with, and preserve for posterity? In fact, all her work also invites nostalgic contemplation about the disappearance of the land of old, and the continuing presence of monuments of bygone days, the traces of history at the intersection of work and land.

THE EXPRESSIVE PRINT

Ilona’s formal compositions are thoroughly classical. This is notoriously difficult to explain in any sort of linear narrative but, suffice it to say, it matters. The viewers have the option of walking by images for any reason or lack thereof. What begs for an explanation is why they stop and study what’s on the wall, as frequently happens with Ilona’s work. Ilona has been photographing for long enough to have mastered the practice of black and white photography. This is about form. But in the course of her professional work and subsequent projects undertaken at the Tasmanian College of the Arts, she has studied the digital printing techniques since the beginnings of the now dominant digital format. It’s fair to say that she has mastered these techniques and the work shows it. Ilona has all along taken pride in her work as a printer, be it silver gelatine monochrome or digital work. I regard her work as ‘mature’. What really holds my viewing attention and excites my admiration for her work is her commitment to the language of colour tonalities. The tonalities of a print express the emotional temperature of things and elicit the dreaming we always project onto anything that really stimulates our imagination. Matters of form, contrast, and tonalities along with the overt pictorial significance of the print are what make the image communicate, to my thinking at least. Perhaps it’s worth mentioning here that the dominant tones of Ilona’s work are generally cool, promoting distance and reflection.

In the interests of disclosure, I must confess that being close to Ilona renders me suspect as partial, a charge to which I must plead guilty. But that said, I’m still prepared to say that I believe that her work is actually important and basically for the reasons stated above. She has successfully elided the dominant photographic themes of our times and developed a style that has both integrity and emotional richness. On the conceptual level, as mentioned above, her portraits of places allows for a vivid problematisation of our inhabited landscapes. Aesthetically, the particular characteristics of place is best addressed by renderings where image quality is able to speak for itself.

Dr. Kevin Frost
Pelverata
ARTIST STATEMENT
After a seven month trip in Europe in 2010, traveling by train, watching the landscape passing by, I found myself re-living my memories of what used to mean home to me. Train tracks passed through industrial landscapes, past villages and industrial suburbs before entering the dense domains of the cities. Such sights were the landscapes of my memory after immigrating to Australia in 1994.

Back home in Tasmania, I was eager to find the stories here. Following the winding roads within hilly landscapes, I found dense rainforests and rocky highland-mountains; whole valleys filled with water to generate energy; power lines stretching through a rugged mountainous landscape; pipelines using the slopes for gravity; mines, quarries, and remnants of villages that had once existed. In the South-West I encountered vast regions of man-altered landscapes cut into the ancient rocks and lakes that were dammed. At the end of the road the Gordon Dam, a massive concave shaped concrete wall stretching over an enormous gorge, blocked the water on one side leaving the other side like one steep open cut. Along the rock walls are buildings, tunnels and concrete blocks that once had a purpose but are now mere remnants of the time when the dam was built. There are stories in these walls. These stories are inherent in the land and its people. The imprints of human dwelling on the landscape leave me with a sense of wonder — what it was or what it has become.

Ilona Schneider

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For my daughter Sadia